



## WISCONSIN PUBLIC RADIO

821 University Avenue, Madison, Wisconsin 53706 [wpr.org](http://wpr.org)

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### **WLSU: Telling Wisconsin Public Radio's Story 2019-2020**

1. *Describe your overall goals and approach to address identified community issues, needs, and interests through your station's vital local services, such as multiplatform long and short-form content, digital and in-person engagement, education services, community information, partnership support, and other activities, and audiences you reached or new audiences you engaged.*

Wisconsin Public Radio's (WPR) WLSU and its affiliate stations —WUEC and WVSS — are committed to community service through news, information, music and entertainment content on air, online and in communities across the state. All of the station's content is produced with the highest standards of ethics and audience service. WPR strives to serve Wisconsin's diverse communities and perspectives with content that is trustworthy, informative, useful, civil and inspiring.

WPR regularly gathers input on community issues, programming decisions and other concerns of our listeners and the broader public. Station reporters, producers and hosts rely on state and national survey results, including regular Marquette Law School polls in Wisconsin, to help guide production of news content heard within newscasts and special segments during WPR's broadcasts of NPR's "Morning Edition" and "All Things Considered." In FY2020, results of surveys were the focus of stand-alone news stories, but the surveys also influenced story selection and coverage angles throughout the year in broadcast and on [wpr.org](http://wpr.org).

In the first half of 2020, COVID-19, racial justice and the presidential primaries led the top stories in the state. WPR demonstrated its deep commitment to providing timely and trustworthy news and public affairs programming. As the pandemic surged in the spring, WPR reporters, producers and editors never took their eyes off the story, even as they worked from home and behind masks. They didn't just report the numbers and science of the virus, they also illuminated its impact with human stories of loss, hope and resilience.

In the early months of the pandemic, Wisconsinites were desperate for information about COVID-19 symptoms, testing and precautions. WPR's broadcast and digital services provided up to the minute information to promote public health and safety alongside crucial information about programs for families and businesses affected by the economic downturn. WPR's WHYsconsin project, which answers public queries



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about issues in the news, received more than 2,100 questions in the first few months of the pandemic alone. Every one of them received a response. The on-going project won the “Best Use of Community Listening in a Crisis” award from Hearken in 2020.

Long-form documentaries were also developed and broadcast from multi-part series that aired throughout the reporting period. For example, in the summer and fall of 2019, WPR explored the ramifications of Wisconsin’s cancelled 2009 bid to adopt high-speed rail in a six-part podcast series, “Derailed.” The series was honored with several awards, including a 2020 Regional Edward R. Murrow Award for “Best Podcast.”

At the start of 2020, Wisconsin was in the national and international spotlight as we anticipated a closely watched presidential election. In response, WPR launched a multi-part series called “Swing State” to explore Wisconsin’s role in national politics, both today and historically. “Swing State” began in the grant reporting period and extended beyond it. In another multi-part series, WPR reached out to several Wisconsinites in March 2020 and asked them to record their experiences with the growing pandemic.

The WPR news team and digital content received numerous awards during the reporting period including multiple awards for the podcast “Derailed,” Midwest Broadcast Journalists Association Eric Severeid awards for hard feature, investigative reporting, and social media, and awards from the Milwaukee Press Club for series reporting, soft feature and use of audio. Our reporters were honored for stories about labor trafficking, alcohol policy, climate change, local cuisine, and more.

With reporters and studios in seven cities around the state, WPR is uniquely positioned to offer voters access to candidates and elected officials at the local, regional and state levels. When questions about in-person and absentee voting surfaced during the spring 2020 elections, WPR provided the most up to date information on air and online. WPR believes in keeping vital information free to all, so it offered its debate coverage to commercial and competing broadcasters free of charge. WLSU’s regional reporters also produced and hosted the award-winning local program “Newsmakers.”

As part of WPR’s continuing commitment to training the next generation of journalists with public media’s high standards of ethics and integrity, the station hired three reporters as part of our fellowship program during the reporting period. In FY2020, the three fellows filed almost 240 stories on issues around the state.



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WLSU's news and cultural stories are also featured in articles at [wpr.org](http://wpr.org) where audiences can post comments, ask questions and connect with other listeners through our online forums. During the reporting period, the site received millions of pageviews and delivered thousands of articles and live-streamed and archive audio.

While numerous WPR live events were cancelled due to the pandemic, eight in-person or virtual events were held during the reporting period and more than 14,000 people participated from communities across the state. Each event was an opportunity for audiences to engage, ask questions and meet WPR staff.

WPR also uses Twitter and Facebook to distribute content, engage audiences on and off air, and for promotion. During the reporting period, WLSU invited listeners to post questions, share information and engage with hosts and guests on social media. WPR's main Facebook page followers increased by approximately 9%, to more than 56,800, as users continued to turn to social media to stay up to date on everything from breaking news to job openings and community events.

In addition to community engagement events, web discussions, and social media, WPR collaborates with PBS Wisconsin to offer a toll-free phone number and email account for public feedback. Each year this in-house audience services team answers tens of thousands of requests from Wisconsinites eager to learn more about the news and information they hear on air or see online. These public comments are compiled and shared with the entire WPR staff on a regular basis.

WLSU is also dedicated to providing a cultural resource to its listeners, with curated classical, folk and jazz music and other related programming. Concert recordings from venues around the state, interviews, and performances ranging from small student ensembles to professional symphony orchestras are part of WPR's "Wisconsin Classical" program.

Music is an important part of WPR's mission, and programs like "The Midday" regularly feature live performances from some of the best state, national and international talents available. "The Road to Higher Ground with Dr. Jonathan Overby" features "world music with African roots and more" each Saturday night. WLSU and its affiliates also feature overnight and weekend jazz programs and, on Sundays, NPR's "Alt Latino" focused on music by Latinx artists.



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WLSU's licensee, the Wisconsin Educational Communications Board, partners with the University of Wisconsin to produce and distribute programming under the banner Wisconsin Public Radio. According to Nielsen, the partnership reached an average of 379,400 listeners each week in the spring of 2020. WPR's websites – including WisconsinLife.org and WisContext—had more than 15.8 million page views.

*2. Describe key initiatives and the variety of partners with whom you collaborated, including other public media outlets, community nonprofits, government agencies, educational institutions, the business community, teachers and parents, etc. This will illustrate the many ways you're connected across the community and engaged with other important organizations in the area.*

WPR's WLSU provides extensive election coverage and collaborates with PBS Wisconsin to broadcast important events, including the annual governor's State of the State address, budget address, and state celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The station encourages listeners to experience the state from diverse perspectives. "Wisconsin Life," a state culture collaboration with PBS Wisconsin, continues this commitment by featuring stories of unexpected Wisconsin people and places on WPR, PBS Wisconsin and online at wisconsinlife.org.

In FY2020, as in all election years, we invited ballot-certified candidates to participate in broadcast debates, forums and interviews and to record unfiltered candidate statements. In the spring, WPR was the only news outlet offering a live candidate debate in the 7th Congressional District special election, a region covering more than one third of the state. The debate was live streamed in partnership with the Wausau Region Chamber of Commerce and simulcast by commercial media in the region as well.

In addition to providing forums for candidates for election, WPR offered listeners information on how to register to vote, where to vote and how to vote in person or absentee. We accomplished this through on-air promotion of the voting information site of the State of Wisconsin Elections Commission, MyVote.WI.gov. The information from this state government agency was particularly important for the people of Wisconsin in the run-up to state, local and national primary elections in April 2020, when Wisconsin was one of the first places in the nation to hold elections during the pandemic lockdown.



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WPR, PBS Wisconsin and University of Wisconsin continued its collaboration on a long-form, digital-first news site called [WisContext.org](http://WisContext.org). [WisContext.org](http://WisContext.org) content is open to syndication and has been republished by media organizations and educators free of charge. During the reporting period, the project received numerous awards for its work and served nearly 670,000 pageviews, a 66% growth over the previous year.

Wisconsin Remembers: A Face for Every Name is a traveling exhibit that features a photo for each of the 1,161 Wisconsinites officially listed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. This poignant display was created in 2016 by WPR in partnership with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum and PBS Wisconsin. Four sets of the 17-panel exhibit – including an outdoor “wall” – were displayed by dozens of veterans and community groups at schools, libraries and other public buildings around the state during the reporting period. WPR publicized the creation of an online version of the Face for Every Name exhibit once pandemic restrictions in spring 2020 made in-person visits to the memorial difficult.

Each year, WPR and PBS Wisconsin also collaborate on culture and entertainment programs, including Final Forte, an annual classical music competition for young performers managed by the Madison Symphony Orchestra. The final competition features four young soloists performing live on stage with the orchestra. It is a free public event and is broadcast statewide live on WLSU and its affiliates and by PBS Wisconsin. WPR also continued partnerships with the Wisconsin School Music Association, Madison Opera and the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, to broadcast live and recorded concerts statewide.

As noted above, WPR also continued their commitment to educating the next generation of reporters with the Mike Simonson Fellowship for Investigative Journalism, which is a partnership with the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism. The fellowship helps attract some of the brightest young minds in journalism to public broadcasting and supports a shared commitment to in-depth reporting on issues important to all Wisconsinites.

WPR hosts regularly make special appearances at events around the state that encourage cultural diversity, music education, the arts and more. And, each month, WPR sponsors dozens of community events around the state to help local nonprofits in the arts, science, business and more connect with our listeners. When restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic made most live concerts and events impossible starting in



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March 2020, our hosts made appearances at virtual events and WPR sponsored virtual events by our partners. We called attention to virtual museum exhibits, online concerts and plays, virtual lectures and workshops and much more.

WPR amplified the messages of many community, government and nonprofit organizations that provided vital services to listeners around the state during the coronavirus pandemic. Beginning in March 2020, WPR reached out to organizations working with domestic violence, food insecurity, job skills and more, to create announcements that informed listeners that these services were still available despite the pandemic restrictions. We provided listeners around the state with information about unemployment insurance, rental and heating assistance, and how to find free public wi-fi. We connected listeners with state and local government and nonprofit organizations that provided a vital safety net during this time of uncertainty and increased need.

WLSU and its affiliates have partnerships with a number of non-profit arts and community organizations in the region, including: Historic Temple Theatre of Viroqua, Mid-West Music Fest, Pump House Regional Arts Center, Heider Center for the Arts, the Great River Folk Festival, Driftless Area Art Festival, International Owl Center, National Eagle Center, Lanesboro Arts, La Crosse Community Theatre, Commonwealth Theatre, Dubuque Museum of Art and the Minnesota Marine Art Museum, Pierce Hill Performing Arts, Elkader Art in the Part, Irishfest La Crosse, Great River Shakespeare Fest, Seed Savers Exchange, La Crosse Symphony Orchestra and the Frozen River Film Festival, among others.

*3. What impact did your key initiatives and partnerships have in your community? Describe any known measurable impact, such as increased awareness, learning or understanding about particular issues. Describe indicators of success, such as connecting people to needed resources or strengthening conversational ties across diverse neighborhoods. Did a partner see an increase in requests for related resources? Please include direct feedback from a partner(s) or from a person(s) served.*

WLSU and its affiliates are part of WPR, the largest network of news bureaus of any media in the state, providing in-depth explorations of Wisconsin's public affairs issues and ideas. Every day WPR broadcasts and online resources help people across the state connect with elected officials and public servants at all levels of local, state and national



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government. The station's coverage of the statewide and local elections in 2020 was particularly important to voters.

As noted elsewhere in this report, when COVID struck, Wisconsinites had questions and trustworthy answers were hard to come by. WPR's audience engagement project, WHYSconsin, invited anyone to submit questions. The project fielded more than 2,100 of them and reported 59 stories on topics like where to get tested, eviction rules, and changes to schools. Every single person who reached out to us received a response that included answers to their questions.

WLSU and its affiliated stations also worked to promote awareness of issues through its annual fundraising efforts. During WPR's December 2019 fundraising drive, listeners were given the option of foregoing a traditional membership thank you gift and instead support Wisconsin-based food pantries. WPR partnered with Alliant Energy, who matched a total of 15,000 meals. Altogether, WPR members and Alliant Energy contributed 30,232 meals to Second Harvest in 2020. Since 2010, WPR has provided more than 400,000 meals via food bank thank-you gifts.

As noted above, the Wisconsin Remembers exhibit, which features a photo for each of the 1,161 Wisconsinites listed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington D.C., has been requested by community groups and displayed in dozens of locations throughout the state. In FY2020, the exhibit toured the state and was seen in 13 communities including Waukesha, Mercer, Green Bay, and Beloit. Three exhibits tour the state each year.

During the reporting period, WPR was selected as one of three public radio stations around the nation to partner with StoryCorps' Military Voices Initiative. The initiative seeks to honor the veteran and military community by recording and preserving their stories. Due to the pandemic, some aspects of the project were delayed, but veteran and community outreach began during the reporting period. WPR connected with military and veterans' organizations across the state and was especially interested in recording the experiences of veterans and service members from underrepresented and marginalized populations in our state. Recordings, made in July 2020, will be aired statewide during the next fiscal year reporting period.

WLSU and its statewide affiliates supported music education through partnerships with the Wisconsin School Music Association, the Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestra, the



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Madison Symphony Orchestra, the University of Wisconsin School of Music, Viterbo University, Lawrence University and other programs around the state. In FY2020, WLSU sponsored community performances, competitions and educational conferences.

WPR's commitment to celebrating young talent included the statewide broadcast of selections from the annual Wisconsin School Music Association Honors Concerts and the Madison Symphony Orchestra's "Final Forte" Bolz Young Artist Competition. Student performances and interviews were regularly broadcast to statewide audiences up until March 2020, when pandemic-related restrictions meant changes to how musical ensembles could perform live.

As noted above, WPR hosts regularly make special appearances at events around the state that encourage literacy, music education, cultural diversity and more. Staff regularly engage with community members to ensure programs are addressing issues that affect real people in Wisconsin. WPR helps local nonprofits promote community events that celebrate nature, agriculture, science, performing arts, families and just plain fun. These promotional partners often report back that WPR's broadcast announcements had a significant impact on their event attendance and success of their programs.

When restrictions on gatherings and live performances brought changes to community events beginning in spring 2020, WPR continued to meet with community members virtually through online events - more than 14,000 people attended one of WPR's eight live or virtual events during the reporting period. Likewise, WPR helped local nonprofits promote virtual and socially distanced community events and programs including tutoring for youth, Black Restaurant Week, Make Music Day, and many others.

*4. Please describe any efforts (e.g., programming, production, engagement activities) you have made to investigate and/or meet the needs of minority and other diverse audiences (including, but not limited to, new immigrants, people for whom English is a second language and illiterate adults) during Fiscal Year 2020, and any plans you have made to meet the needs of these audiences during Fiscal Year 2021. If you regularly broadcast in a language other than English, please note the language broadcast.*

WPR, including WLSU and its affiliates, is committed to serving all Wisconsinites and to reflecting the diverse experiences and perspectives of our state in our programs and



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staffing. During the reporting period, new hires brought new voices and experiences to the station's broadcast programs and work behind the scenes.

WPR continues its work to improve diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) throughout the organization and specifically with the help of a staff "change team" — which is a collaboration with PBS Wisconsin. As shifts toward anti-racist and anti-ableist workplace practices became more commonplace in the DEI landscape, WPR continued to promote a culture where employees take responsibility for their own growth and learning in support of DEI, managers are responsible for supporting and encouraging work in DEI, and leadership is responsible for championing DEI initiatives. The station's DEI vision and goals continued to focus on four main areas: culture and retention, accessibility, content, and recruitment.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the change team hosted in-person learning experiences such as political polarization in the media, working toward a more inclusive journalism, and racial segregation in Wisconsin. During the pandemic, the change team continued to publish a monthly newsletter, present at monthly staff meetings, consult with units around WPR and PBS Wisconsin as they reframe work toward more anti-racist approaches, and ultimately, help build staff capacity for organizational change.

One example of this approach is WPR's work to reflect Wisconsin's diversity on air. WPR's journalists and producers rely heavily on sources like guest experts, authors, scientists, elected officials and business owners to provide context, perspective and experience. In a typical year, more than 3,500 individuals may appear on WPR airwaves.

In 2020, the station's news and talk teams publicly released the results of a year-long study of the demographic diversity of sources. While the report included some positive news — such as near equal representation of males and females and generally strong geographic representation of sources statewide — it also showed that WPR turned to white sources in nearly nine out of 10 instances.

In response, WPR established a new source librarian position within the content team. They are responsible for working to diversify the collection of contacts and support continuing research to measure progress and help improve inclusion on air. The station anticipated annual reporting on the demographics of on-air sources.



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During the reporting period, WPR was one of several media organizations selected to participate in the Poynter Institute's nine-month Table Stakes program. Table Stakes is designed to help media organizations focus on strategy, planning, experimentation and evaluation; in short, to become "learning organizations." As part of program workshops and conferences, WPR leadership had opportunities to learn from non-profit and commercial media colleagues working on diversity, equity and inclusion efforts across the nation. Training also included presentations on best practices from diversity, equity and inclusion consultants such as The Maynard Institute for Journalism Education.

On air and online during this reporting period, WLSU and its affiliate reporters covered a significant number of stories that explored issues of diversity, including education, policing, business development, farming, health care, immigration and homelessness in Wisconsin among other things. The police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis sparked a deeper reckoning with racism and injustice in America. Wisconsinites gathered for peaceful protests that, in some communities, were followed by riots and vandalism. WPR worked to cover the whole story in all its complexity.

In addition to exploring issues of diversity through our news coverage, our cultural coverage regularly features people and places that reflect Wisconsin's diverse population. "Wisconsin Life," our collaboration with PBS Wisconsin, has featured stories by and about immigration, religion, community and important figures and events of Wisconsin's past and present.

Each January, the station broadcasts the official state ceremony honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., produced and hosted by WPR's Dr. Jonathan Overby. WPR's music programming also reflects the diversity of musical traditions around the world, including "The Road to Higher Higher Ground" and "The Odyssey Series", which focuses on music from around the world and its power to create a greater understanding of those near and far.

WPR's website, [wpr.org](http://wpr.org), also live streams the annual State of the Tribes Address from the State Capitol. And, through community partnerships, the station regularly features and promotes events and educational activities that embrace diversity and inclusion. WPR partnered with the Literacy Network of Dane County during the reporting period, to draw attention to their work with low literacy adults and speakers of languages other than English. In addition, WPR staff attended workshops with the Wisconsin Council of



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the Blind and Visually Impaired to learn about making social media and web design accessible for all.

In addition to our compliance with all state and federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission requirements, WPR works closely with its human resource offices at the University of Wisconsin to manage recruitment and hiring practices in an equitable and inclusive manner.

On the recruitment side, the station promotes job openings through mainstream employment listings and paid, targeted promotion through social media and professional networks such as the National Black Journalists Association.

In hiring, WPR requires all members of the hiring committee to abide by EEOC standards, UW-Madison and State of Wisconsin standards and to understand the role that unconscious and implicit bias can play in the review of applicants and interviewees.

The station has also adjusted many position descriptions over the years to ensure that essential job functions reflect the reality of the work and do not unnecessarily include requirements that might privilege one group of people over another.

As noted previously in this report, WPR offers three different journalism fellowships primarily focused on early-career journalists. While one of those fellowships, the Second Century Fellowship, is exclusively available to People of Color, each of the fellowships has attracted a more racially diverse applicant pool.

*5. Please assess the impact that your CPB funding had on your ability to serve your community. What were you able to do with your grant that you wouldn't be able to do if you didn't receive it?*

We share and preserve the stories of Wisconsin's people. Our programs celebrate Wisconsin's way of life. We reach out beyond broadcasts to serve Wisconsin online and in the community. Without CPB funding, all of these things would be affected. WLSU is the flagship for the largest and only statewide radio news organization in Wisconsin. Because of strong funding support, we continue to attract and keep the best available broadcast journalists, including two full-time reporters at the Capitol.



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Federal support, in addition to state, business and individual support, is critical to our balanced, sustainable and responsible approach to funding our essential services. During the pandemic, WPR saw a dramatic decline in support from business sponsors. The reliable support of CPB funding allows us to maintain services during critical news events, such as the COVID-19 public health emergency.

The scope of national programs broadcast on WLSU and its affiliates would be greatly diminished without CPB's support. Programs like NPR's "Morning Edition" and "All Things Considered" help keep our listeners connected to the world and help us put local and statewide content in a national or even international context.

CPB funding helps ensure that our cultural programming - including the presentation of local, national and internationally respected classical musicians – is available for tens of thousands of listeners every week. And, of course, CPB funding contributes to our ability to reach audiences beyond broadcast with online streaming, news and cultural content, mobile apps, community events and more.